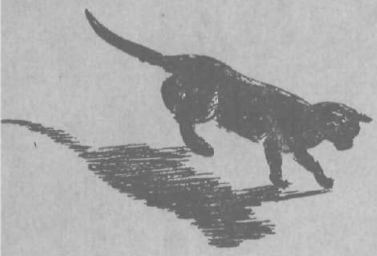

THE DESERTED VILLAGE

By

DR. ARTHUR L. JOHNSON

Published by THE UNION COUNTY PARK COMMISSION, *Elizabeth, N. J.*

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THE DESERTED VILLAGE

By

DR. ARTHUR L. JOHNSON,

County Superintendent of Schools, Union County, N. J.

Illustrations by

HILMA M. HULTGREN

Published by

THE UNION COUNTY PARK COMMISSION

Administration Building, Warinanco Park, Elizabeth, N. J.

Price 25c

The Deserted Village together with considerable surrounding acreage has become one of the most important units in the Union County Park System. The stream known as Blue Brook, flowing through the Watchung Reservation, has been left undisturbed in order not to destroy any of the natural scenic effects.

The policy of the Park Commission has been to allow this section to return to its original native state. The development of wild flowers and various plant growths indigenous to this area has been encouraged.

There are a number of well-paved approaches to the Reservation, although none leads directly through the Deserted Village. There are also mountain paths, some of which were original game trails, leading through and over the mountains, which are traveled frequently by nature lovers or by those who would escape for a brief period the noise and commotion of the cities, and there find rest and relaxation in the tranquillity of the forest.

This plan as outlined by the Park Commission has been fully accepted and amply appreciated by the many visitors who frequent this reservation. As time passes, new generations will have reason to laud this far-seeing policy of the Park Commission, and more and more the weary will seek the solitude of the forest, where they will find natural beauty and the opportunity for rest and relaxation.

THE DESERTED VILLAGE*

BETWEEN THE FIRST AND SECOND MOUNTAINS, which constitute a part of the Watchung Range along the east branch of Green Brook, called Blue Brook, lies the Deserted Village. There can be little doubt that in this protected valley between the two mountains was located in early times an Indian village. Throughout the narrow valley have been found numerous implements used by the Red Man, and on the neighboring hillsides still others have been turned up by the farmer's plough. The Indians for some distance habitually came to this region for protection during the winter period. This seems to be an established tradition preserved by descendants of old settlers both on Staten Island and near Plainfield: that the Indians even at a comparatively late date, lived in the outbuildings of the whites, when they left their villages on Staten Island and those about Raritan Bay in the autumn, to winter in the sheltered valley at the foot of the Watchung Mountains. It is altogether probable and quite possible that Warinanco and Mattano, who sold this land to the white men in 1664, spent their winters in this valley. The Indians of this region named the Watchung Range, "Wach Unks," which in English means High Hills.

Early settlers found trails used by the native Red Men which in part at least were widened and developed into roads. The fact has been well established that the Old New Providence Road and the Cataract Hollow Road were once Indian trails that led to this valley. Should further evidence of the presence of the Red Man in this region be necessary, there are the two famous trails, whose names have been preserved and their general location established, viz., Mo-no-pe-nouk and Wa-ha-kick.

The level spot high above the brook where the village stands was the site of native habitations and in those distant days before the white man came, the hunter brought his deer to the wickiup. There the

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* *Variously known as "Feltville," "The Deserted Village," and "Glenside Park, New Providence Township," now included in the Watchung Reservation, Union County Park System.*

The hunter brought his deer to the wickiup

Peter Willcoxie being a progressive and energetic settler, and moreover a man of perception, early conceived the idea of building a mill to serve the settlers, who were now taking up land in constantly increasing numbers. At the foot of the bluff upon which his house was located was a beaver dam, which appeared to him fruitful with possibilities. Utilizing the rocky boulders on the sides of the hills and the logs from his clearings, he constructed a dam across the brook on the site of the old beaver dam. Below the dam on a natural level space of ground and about four rods from the base of the lower section of the bluff, he built this mill fed by a race, which ran from the breast of the dam along the face of the bluff to the mill. Here he installed his machinery probably brought from Elizabethtown by ox carts. That the venture was successful is evidenced by the fact that roads were soon built which were called mill roads.

The undertaking prospered and continued in operation during and after the period of settlement. During the Revolution, the mill was converted into a powder plant for the manufacture of coarse powder to be used by the artillery in Washington's army, and again it was utilized for the same purpose during the war of 1812. There is an interesting tradition, still repeated by the descendants of early settlers, that the British possessed knowledge of the existence of a powder factory in this region, and, that the attempt of the English army to

penetrate the interior, which resulted in the Battle of Springfield, was in reality for the purpose of destroying this mill. This, however, may have no foundation in fact but the persistent repetition of the story from various sources may possess an element of truth.

That the mill continued to operate and to provide the settlers with their needs is beyond the region of doubt, for it apparently was still in operation at the time of its purchase by Mr. Felt in 1845.

Like many rural sections similar in character, this agricultural community followed in the even tenor of its way. The early settlers fulfilled their simple mission and passed from the scene giving place to a new generation following in the footsteps of their ancestors. The gradual extinction of families led to the injection of new elements until today the region is largely populated by various families, whose ancestral roots were established in various and somewhat distant sections of our country. This has resulted in a drastic change in community character, but the Deserted Village still remains as a symbol of a past never to return. It devolves upon the author of this narrative to reconstruct in descriptive language its more recent history, which although in large part is still available, yet gaps occur, which can only be bridged by piecing together the fragmentary allusions from a variety of sources considered fairly reliable.

FELTVILLE

In the previous narration, it has been related that this valley through which Blue Brook flows to join the parent stream, Green Brook, was an early grant to Peter Willcoxie called Peter's Hill. This tract of land remained in the possession of the Willcoxie family until about 1845, when it was purchased from the heirs by Mr. David Felt of New York for manufacturing purposes.

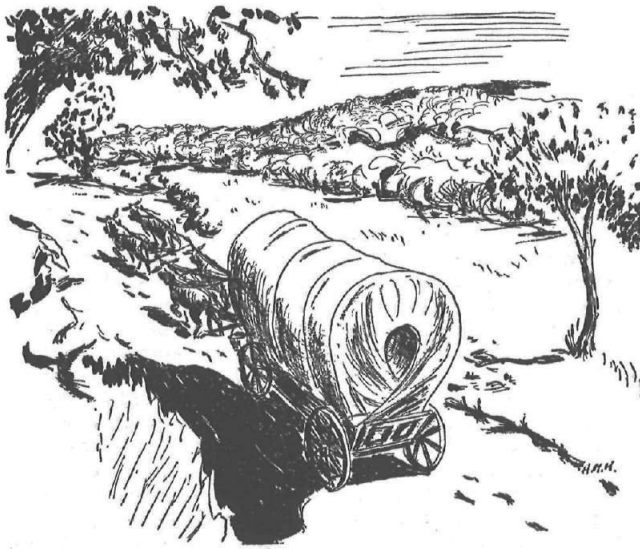
David Felt was a prosperous printer and stationer in New York City where he had conducted a successful business for several years and having accumulated considerable wealth, conceived the idea of establishing a manufacturing industry outside of the city. After considerable investigation, he decided to purchase the Willcoxie property, including the mill and the water rights, where he could not only do his own printing but also manufacture the paper used in his establishment. With this purpose in view, he enlarged the mill, rebuilt the mill dam, and installed new machinery for the manufacture of paper, the printing and binding of books, as well as the production of stationery for the trade. One of the new improvements in his plant was the installation of a dye-house and equipment for making marbleized paper, in which he had developed a special interest.

Due to the natural isolation of this property, poor roads, and undeveloped transportation facilities, Mr. Felt was compelled not only

to import his skilled workmen, but also provide homes and necessary facilities for their general welfare. It then became obligatory to erect a village surrounding his industry with such provisions as were needed in a community so far removed from other settlements. In order to provide for all the requirements of his employees, he erected a large stately mansion for his family, twenty-four houses for his workmen and in addition a boarding-house for unmarried men, a schoolhouse, church, company store and a large store-house.

The store was located in the church building on the first floor, while on the second floor were held religious services. The church was undenominational and services were conducted at various times by ministers from adjacent villages or by travelling missionaries. The stock carried in the store was general merchandise and not only provided the residents of Feltville with their needs but was patronized by farmers living in the vicinity.

When Felt bought the property, he found two mills already built. The first, as you ascend the stream, was enlarged and became a wall paper manufacturing plant, a printing plant and a plant for making stationery. The second mill, which was at one time used to make gunpowder, was remodeled and used for the same purpose as the first.



Conestoga wagons were used to transport his products

David Felt after he had come into possession of the property, and when his business began to expand necessitating an increase in production, built a second dam and mill about 100 yards above the first dam.

The production of his workshops included the following products: Blank-books, stationery, ruling of writing paper, general book-printing and book-binding, marbleized paper for books, the publication of advertising material and posters. All publications bore the imprint "Stationers Hall Press, Feltville, N. J., David Felt and Co., Stationers and Printers." One book only remains as testimony of his book-printing business, viz., "Littell's Genealogy," which happens to be one of the rarest items of Jerseyana.

The following interesting and accurate description of Feltville was written in 1882 by a writer who lived not far distant from the village and was intimately familiar with its establishment and development during the period it was owned and operated by David Felt:

"Summit, N. J., August 19, 1882. — About four miles southwest of this place, in a narrow but fertile valley through which Green Brook winds on its willow-shaded way to meet the Raritan River, lies the deserted village of Feltville, in the midst of nearly a thousand acres of meadow, orchard and woodland. Twenty years ago Feltville was a *thriving factory and farming village of three or four hundred inhabitants*, with a busy mill, a bustling country store, a prosperous school and a well attended church. On August 9 the whole place with its twenty-six decaying houses, its bat-tenanted mill and its bramble-chocked graveyard, were sold at auction for a little more than eleven thousand dollars.

"Nearly forty years ago David Felt, a dealer in stationery in New York, bought this tract of land. He built a mill, one hundred feet long and four stories high, for the manufacture of different kinds of paper. Two large reservoirs were constructed and one extended back and up the valley to connect with a long narrow natural lake, while the other formed a pretty little pond just below the turn of the bluff on which the village stood. The land was laid out in apple and peach orchards, meadows, groves and pastures; two broad streets were made, which met at right angles on the point overhanging the pond; two rows of trim double houses were built on the bluff that extended along the brook and rose above the mill to a height of seventy feet; and on the street running back from the millstream and its gorge rose the store, the church, some farmers' houses and a neat school building. Within the angle where the two streets met, the owner of the village built for himself a stately country house with broad verandas on two sides, commanding the picturesque views of the wooded heights across the gorge, the mill pond below and the narrow valley extending back among the green hills. Neat paths bordered with trim boxwood hedges wound among flower-beds, about ornamental evergreen trees and under

The mill machinery arrived in ox-carts

wide-spreading lindens and magnolias at the front of the mansion, while at the side were broad lawns and a well-kept orchard. Across the street from the mansion a pretty summer house looked down upon the pond, where light rowboats floated among the reflections of green trees and blue sky in the water. Around the houses where the mill hands and their families lived were flower-beds and grass-plots, and at the back of each was a little vegetable garden. Down the nearly perpendicular bluff ran zig-zag paths formed of stone steps which led from the tenements across the mill-race on little plank bridges to the mill. Between the mill and the swift-running stream was the road to Scotch Plains and Fanwood, three miles away. The brook, fretted by mossy boulders and shaded by overhanging elms, was crossed by a rustic bridge, from which a path led up into a deep rocky glen where a clear mountain streamlet foamed in the cool depths among gray, lichen-covered rocks. The whole village was kept by its owner in the best of order. The two streets and the road leading down to the mill were as smooth and hard as if they were macadamized. They were shaded by long rows of stately elms and maples, and bordered by smooth sidewalks of flagstone. On week days, and especially on Saturdays, this orderly hamlet was filled with life and bustle. The mill-wheel and the machinery rumbled and buzzed, the factory girls and the men talked and laughed as much as they dared to at their work, the store was crowded with buyers, the streets were filled with teams, the reapers worked in the fields and a drowsy hum floated from the open windows of the school. On Sunday all was quiet, and the villagers in their best clothes filled the little church, over which Mr. Felt always maintained an Episcopal clergyman.

"The owner of the village was a man of a strong, positive nature, cold and reserved, and he ruled the village people as far as he could with as much methodical strictness as he applied to his boxwood hedges and well trimmed cedar trees. All of his employees were compelled to trade at his store, and those who lived in his two large boarding-houses had to keep within the strictest bounds. At seven o'clock in the morning the bell on the great barn at the 'Mansion House' rang for work to begin. At twelve and one o'clock it rang for the dinner recess, and when it sounded again the mill-wheel stopped and the mill hands came trooping out of the big door and climbed the winding paths beneath the trees on the bluff for their suppers. When night had fallen and nine o'clock had come, the bell rang out again, and ill-fared the youth and maiden who were found strolling in the rocky glen or beside the rushing millstream, for a rigid rule was laid down that all in the village must be within doors when the last bell echoed through the darkened woods. How often must young couples have been rudely surprised by that unwelcome sound in the midst of some low whispered sentence, or when gazing silently from the rustic bridge at the pale evening star gleaming low in the west through pendant branches of elms? For many years the life of the village flowed on quietly and prosperously in the picturesque valley. There were births and marriages and deaths. There was work in the mill and on the farm, and there were entertainments at the 'Mansion House,' and holidays, when the village green was gay with merry-makers.

"Then the village was sold and its orderly owner moved away. The mill was closed, the water fell unused over the dam, and one by one the operatives drifted away from the village, or found other employment in the vicinity. The mansion, the church and the store were closed and the school dwindled slowly to a ghost of its former self. The farm work was continued fitfully for a time, and then a large mortgage on the property was foreclosed. The place changed hands again and fell little by little into the melancholy state of ruin in which it is today. It requires a strong effort of the imagination to realize that the now silent and grass-grown streets, the ruined mill and the windowless houses were once filled with busy life. The flagstone sidewalks have disappeared entirely or are partly hidden by a thick sod of many years' growth. Many of the houses that were once cheerful homes have vanished and left only gaping cellar-holes behind them. The double row of tenements above the ruined mill are still standing. Rugged clumps of thorny shrubs before them show where climbing roses grew and covered open doorways through which busy housewives were once to be seen and heard singing at their work. The mill-wheel has gone, and one lonely looking fly-wheel of wood attached to an iron rod is all that is left of the whirling machinery. The four empty stories of the mill are filled with dilapidated silence while daylight streams in through

the gaping windows, and with the rustle of bats' wings and the hooting of owls when night has settled down upon the deserted village. Beside the mill stands a square building, the lower story of which is built of square blocks of brownstone with the chinks filled by chipped pieces of the same material instead of mortar. The upper story is of wood and a shingled roof covers the whole ancient, weather-beaten structure. The building is called 'The Powder-Mill,' and was used for making gunpowder before and during the Revolution. Tradition has it that Washington had large quantities of powder stores in the place during his operations in that part of New Jersey; and that it was of great service to him at the time of the skirmish at Scotch Plains, three miles distant. The cold spring that bubbles up among the great boulders in the rocky glen across the mill brook is all that is left of the foaming mountain stream, and is called the Washington Spring. The wild glen, its lichen-covered sides and its fragrant cedars that cling with their hardy roots to the moss-grown rocks, attract many picnic parties thither which fill the silent woods with the echoes of unwonted gaiety. The store is standing with empty shelves and counters, but the wooden steps outside, where the male gossips of the village were wont to gather of summer evenings have vanished. The straightbacked seats still remain in the church, but the altar is bare and worm-eaten, and the font where many an infant was christened has gone. The school building stands beneath the trees where two roads meet and seems to gaze toward each direction in blank despair from its open windows, as if waiting in vain to see the old troops of children come loitering with books and luncheon pails in hand up the roads.

"The only dwellers in the village now are a gentleman and his family from Newark and a German cane-cutter, who inhabit the decaying Mansion House. A man who has for some years had charge of the village lives in a ruined farm-house on the outskirts of the place. The Mansion is the only house in the village that is at all inhabitable, and that is fast going to ruin. The Newark gentleman, A. M. Coe, lives in the main part of it, which was built by Mr. Felt, while the old cane-cutter lives with a wife and two children in the old house that was built by the original possessor of the property, a man named Willcox. Mr. Coe comes to the place for the summer and 'camps out,' as he calls it, in the old house. There are carpets on the floors and pictures on the old walls that are covered with queer old paper in which wonderful landscapes and bunches of strange flowers are depicted. A piano stands in the old drawing-room with its sagging floor and huge fireplace, from which the border of handsome marbles is beginning to fall away. In the library, which is now used as a kitchen, a quaint old Franklin stove is built into the fireplace, the book-shelves are used for the kitchen utensils, and the old desk where the founder of the village did his writing is a work-table. In the grounds about the house

the boxwood hedge has grown beyond all bounds, the ornamental trees have assumed all sorts of painfully distorted shapes, and the magnolias are full of dead and dying limbs. The summer house still looks down from the bluff, but the pond has gone and weeds and bushes fill its place. The belfry on the big barn is empty and the bell no longer startles the echoes of the glen. Superstitious members of picnic parties, however, have affirmed that, at the hour of nine, the far-off sound of a bell has been heard and ghostly shapes have been seen to glide from the glen and hurry across the rustic bridge toward the old mill.

"There is no more melancholy or suggestive spot in the whole village than the wild plot at some distance back of the church on a separate knoll where the burying-ground once was. No fence separated the place from the surrounding fields, while the rose bushes that were placed by loving hands on the graves of departed friends and the ornamental shrubbery that bordered family lots have overrun the spot till it is a small, impassable wilderness of thorns and brambles. Dozens of brownstone slabs that were once headstones and footstones of graves that no longer appear stick up among the bushes in melancholy attitudes, and shrubs that were planted near the heads of children's graves have grown into small trees and lifted the little headstones out of the ground in a leafy embrace.

"A large tree that was once a weeping willow, but is now too old for tears, is surrounded by a ruined picket fence. The trunk of the tree nearly fills the inclosure, and what little space is left is filled by a wild rose bush and two stones from which the inscriptions are worn away. Two village girls who were drowned in the lake within sight of the helpless lover of one of them lie buried there, and the wild roses that grow above them are said to exhale an odor of unusual sweetness. The only stone in the old graveyard on which an inscription still appears is a round topped slab of brownstone, at the top of which a face with an Egyptian fillet about it is depicted. Below the face is the inscription.

"He was a member of the family that originally possessed the site of the village. All that came after him and his have passed away and sleep unknown and forgotten in the neglected graveyard of the deserted village."

Mr. Arthur W. Hicks of Summit, who for years made an intensive study of this section, wrote the author in 1929 in answer to an inquiry made at that time:

"The western branch of Green Brook rises not far from where the eastern branch of Stony Brook does, and the eastern branch — sometimes called Blue Brook — has its source at the extreme eastern end of the Feltville valley; these join above the Falls Mill or Green River Mill section and flow as Green Brook through the gap at Scotch Plains.

"In legislative acts forming surrounding townships the eastern branch of Green Brook is sometimes called Blue Brook and sometimes Green Brook; while in title descriptions it is more frequently described as Blue Brook. Littell makes frequent mention of Feltville Valley, Blue Brook and Green Brook. The Hale, Raddin, Clark, Line and Badgley families all lived in the Feltville valley east of Feltville and the Willcox and Frazee families west of Feltville and east of Green Brook. Littell also makes reference to Washington valley, but always as applying to the section drained by Stony Brook and Middle Brook. I have never seen it applied to the Feltville section.

"Old road records refer to the Green River and the Green River Mills as the mills later called the Falls Mills. I know of no use of the name Feltville until the Felt family became owners of what had been known as the Blue River Mills. The name Blue Hills Valley I have seen applied in early records to the Feltville Valley.

"As a boy and young man, between the years of 1880 and 1890, I had a very intimate knowledge of the whole Feltville valley eastward from Rattlesnake Brook and an acquaintance with every one of its inhabitants, many of whom were then aged and had lived there all their lives. There was a path or trail, or the remains of one, which started near the old Briant mill pond in East Summit, ran through the Sayre, Badgley, and other properties along under the north side of the First Mountain to the ravine at Feltville; this was called by the older inhabitants the old Indian path. At Feltville it separated and a branch seemed to double back up the hill in a southeasterly direction while the other continued on toward Scotch Plains. It was not wide enough to have ever been used for vehicles and its chief characteristic was that no matter how muddy it was, this path always afforded dry footing."

DAVID FELT

David Felt had a warehouse in New York where he stored his manufactured goods and an office for the conduct of his business. In order to transport the products of his industry, he kept a double team of mules which were hitched to a large Conestoga wagon with red running gears, and the body painted blue. This was the vehicle used to transport his manufactured products to New York. He employed a man named Jerry Redden as driver of the mules, who continued in this employment during the period of ownership by Felt.

The proprietor of Feltville was a large man with gray hair and a flowing white beard. Stern and commanding, he was the perfect type of a country gentleman, demanding and securing the respect not only of the people employed in his industry, but was universally respected and beloved by the villagers and all the residents of the section. Due perhaps to his patriarchal appearance as well as his general human interest in the welfare of all, he was always affectionately called, "King David." Felt was a deeply religious man and required all the villagers to attend church on Sunday. He lived like a country gentleman, had a fine manor house, and kept a coach and employed a coachman. He lived luxuriously for the time and surrounded himself with servants and all the appurtenances wealth can provide. While nothing is known concerning his early educational advantages, he was apparently a great reader and a well informed man for his manor house contained a large library, which in all probability was not used for ornamental purposes. His business office in New York occupied the greater portion of his time and attention, and, in order to be relieved of the direct management of his industry at Feltville, he placed this responsibility into the hands of his nephew, George Felt. Nothing is known of this nephew, but apparently, his work was satisfactory, for during the period of his management, the industry prospered. Nothing is known of David Felt after the disposal of the property, and there has never been discovered a plausible reason for his sudden disposition of the industry at Feltville. The natural inference is that like many others of his time, because of age and possible dis-

ability, the time had arrived for retirement from active life, when he felt financially able to consider withdrawal from all his business relations. Mr. Charles Drake told the writer that his father accompanied David Felt to the railroad station after he had severed all connections with Feltville, and gave Mr. Drake this prophetic farewell, "Well, King David is dead, and the village will go to hell."

Since writing the above statement based on supposition, the following information has come to light although its authenticity has not been established. It may, however, have some basis in fact, and if it were possible to examine the books of the firm, it could then be given as the direct cause of David Felt's sale of his property. In the absence of such evidence, the statement is included with the understanding that the author assumes no responsibility for its reliability.

It has been reported that the greater volume of his business was with southern firms, with whom he carried on a constantly increasing commercial intercourse, particularly with New Orleans, until the outbreak of the Civil War, when his business in the South was brought to a sudden close. It has been said that from this period the industry suffered a decline, and being unable to supplement the loss of the southern trade by northern customers, he became discouraged and disposed of his property.

Dr. Samuel P. Townsend next became the owner of the village and proceeded at once to take possession. The new proprietor was the "Original Doctor Jacob," a manufacturer of sarsaparilla and is reported to have given the famous Sarsaparilla Palace on Murray Hill on Fifth Avenue in exchange for Feltville. Townsend was a man of pleasing personality, very much liked and generally respected. When he became the owner and took possession, the mills were closed and the workmen who had been employed in the industry moved away. The store, for lack of patronage, also was closed. Evidently it was his intention at first to use the mills for the manufacture of sarsaparilla, but the machinery and equipment did not lend itself for natural conversion, therefore, he decided to plant peach and apple trees and raise tobacco. He planted several fields of tobacco, using the lower mill for curing. When he found his crop difficult to market, he brought out from New York several cigar makers, who manufactured his tobacco into cigars. The store which had been closed was now vacant, and in order to provide a workshop for these new employees, this building was converted into a cigar factory. The upper mill, which had also been closed, was used to house negroes imported to work in his tobacco fields. There is no evidence that this project was successful, and in all probability became a losing venture. Either Townsend's sarsaparilla business was declining or his losses at Feltville were of such volume as to compel him to place a substantial mortgage on the village. Whatever precipitated the crisis in the financial affairs of Townsend

remains unknown but this fact is self-evident that the end of this Happy Valley of Rasselas, with its own local government, based on contract with employees, where order, temperance, and liberal worship were combined, passed into history with the change in ownership.

In 1873, Nancy Townsend, to whom Feltville had been transferred by her husband, Dr. Townsend, borrowed from the Globe Mutual Life Insurance Company the sum of $50,000. and in 1876 a further loan was negotiated for the sum of $20,000. During the period from the date of the last loan until 1882, no payments were made on the principal and the interest payments were in default. During the early part of 1882, the Globe Mutual Life Insurance Company went into the hands of a receiver, and James D. Fish ordered the property to be sold at public auction on August 9th, 1882. The sale was conducted at the time advertised, and the property was sold to Warren Ackerman of Plainfield for a consideration of $11,450. The statement was made at the sale that the village with adjacent land and mill property was an estate consisting of 774 acres.

For the benefit of those individuals who may be interested in the details of somewhat intricate real estate transfers, the following statement has been submitted, taken from the official records as they now appear permanently recorded.

"In the year 1845 David Felt, a resident of New York City, purchased six plots of land from the following persons named. The entire acreage involved in this purchase consisted of 759 acres:

David B. Lum and wife	April 29, 1845
John T. Robeson and wife	April 29, 1845
Moses Reeve and wife	April 29, 1845
David Sayre and wife	April 28, 1845
John C. Lum and wife	April 29, 1845
Samuel Badgley and wife	May 1, 1854

"This land was conveyed by David Felt and wife to Amasa S. Foster, August 17, 1860.

"Foster sold the tract to Nancy Townsend, wife of Samuel P. Townsend, March 24, 1864.

"On January 9, 1869, Nancy Townsend and husband sold the property to William H. Trafton, and on the same day William H. Trafton and wife gave back a purchase money mortgage for $92,000. to Nancy Townsend.

"Mrs. Townsend assigned this mortgage to the Knickerbocker Life Insurance Company, December 1, 1871.

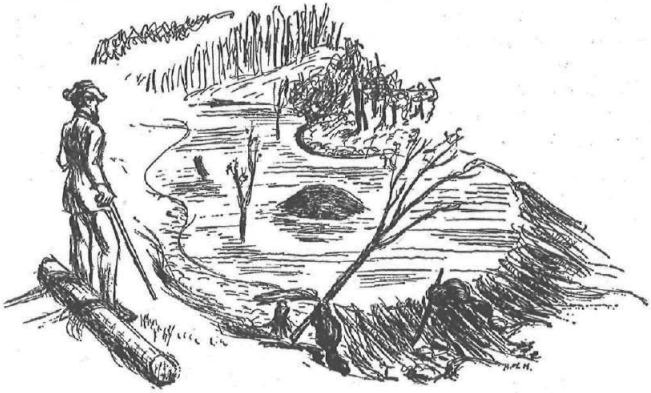
"Nancy Townsend repurchased at a sheriff's sale October 22, 1873, on the foreclosure of a mortgage held by the Knickerbocker Life Insurance Company for the sum of $82,000.

"On October 22, 1873, Nancy Townsend borrowed from the Globe Mutual Life Insurance Company the sum of $50,000. and on January 4, 1876, a further loan was negotiated for the sum of $20,000.

"On February 1st, 1879, Nancy Townsend made promises to the Globe Mutual Life Insurance Company, and as a result, the Globe Mutual Life Insurance Company entered into an agreement with Nancy Townsend whereby she might redeem the property upon payment of $79,385.80. The period fixed for this payment was two years.

"Mrs. Townsend was unable to meet this obligation.

"Directly after the expiration of the time limit, the Globe Mutual Life Insurance Company went into the hands of a receiver.



Beavers constructed the first dams here

"On August 9, 1882, James D. Fish, receiver of the Globe Mutual Life Insurance Company, advertised the property for sale at public auction, at the Union County Court House. The sale was conducted at the time advertised, and the property was sold to Warren Ackerman of Plainfield for a consideration of $11,450.

"On September 19, 1882, James D. Fish, who had been appointed receiver of the Globe Mutual Life Insurance Company, conveyed the property to Warren Ackerman of Plainfield."

As soon as the transfer of the property to Mr. Ackerman had been completed in September, 1882, he converted the estate into a stock farm, where he raised fancy stock from registered breeds of cattle, which at that time were in great demand. It was his theory that strong, vigorous animals could only be produced where conditions would permit sufficient range and an abundance and variety of green

pasture and succulent plants, which grew in abundance on this abandoned estate. His first purchase was one hundred calves to which were added others as their size and age increased. There were still many farmers, who preferred oxen to horses, especially in the cultivation of hilly land, so believing there was a sufficient demand for such animals, he also raised oxen. Shortly after his occupancy of the estate, he repaired the cottages and rented them to a summer colony from Newark.

His fancy stock required the supervision and protection of an experienced overseer whose reliability was unquestioned and whose natural interest would insure the proper care of his substantial investment. Such a man was found in the person of Frank Hasniger, who became the first manager of the estate. Some time after his employment, he was drowned in what is now known as Lake Surprise, under circumstances of which causes and details can not at this late date be obtained. He was succeeded by Simon P. Debbie, a native of the Stony Hill section, who continued as manager until the discontinuance of its use for stock raising and until the property was finally transferred to other ownership.

During the period of ownership of Mr. Ackerman, certain changes were made, which made the village and the mill more accessible from two directions:

1. The property was fenced and a rustic gateway prevented access to the village from the east.
2. A roadway was built on the western side of the first mountain from the top of the elevation to the stream below. This road then became a continuation of the road leading to Scotch Plains, or the present Route 29.
3. Formerly, the old road to the village branched from the mill road and avoiding the point of the elevation at the west of the cottages, joined the main street at the crest. In order to provide a continuous road from the east, and provide a more direct approach to the village from the brook, the mill race was filled in a short distance north of the mill and a new road built along the face of the hill leading to the village.
4. The lower mill was converted into a building to house the stock and the second mill was torn down.

When Mr. Ackerman bought the property, there was considerable speculation regarding his desire for possession of the estate. Some individuals believed Mr. Ackerman was representing the Plainfield Water Company, and was making the purchase in order to secure the water rights, while others knowing that the Lehigh Valley Railroad engineers had surveyed the property and were considering the pro-

Another mill was built to increase production

jection of a branch through the village, regarded the purchase as a shrewd piece of speculation. When Mr. Ackerman was asked his purpose in making the investment, he made the laconic reply: "Because I wanted it."

Mr. Ackerman's fancy stock raising project either did not yield the profits expected due to market fluctuations, or his interest declined after a few years of operation. He finally disposed of his registered herd, and the demand for oxen having ceased, the remaining yokes on the range were sold at sacrifice prices.

THE FALL MILL

In narrating the early history of Feltville, its industries and development, from a mere collection of farm houses and a single mill, to the busy village it later became, without alluding to another mill and colony established a short distance down the stream on Green Brook, would appear to be incomplete. There are no records available at present to indicate the date of the erection of the first mill at Peter's Hill. It would seem, however, that this must have been built shortly

following the coming of the first settlers in 1720. The date of erection of the mill on Green Brook has been established, and the fact that this grist mill was built by Willcox would indicate some connection between the two projects.

On this site about one mile from the village of Scotch Plains and below the junction of the two streams, Green Brook and Blue Brook, Mr. Willcox established a grist-mill in 1763, which became known throughout the region as the Fall Mill. The miller was without doubt the son of Peter Willcoxie, who was the founder of the mill at Peter's Hill. The Fall Mill was a successful venture and it is recorded did a large and prosperous business with the farmers of the neighborhood. This mill remained under the ownership and management of the Willcox family until 1851 when Charles Edwards and John Clark purchased the property and during the new ownership was operated under the firm name of Edwards and Clark. The mill continued to be directed by these partners for a short period only when it was sold to Elias W. Drake, who conveyed the property and all of its rights to Aaron Darby on February 9, 1852. The mill was operated by this owner until his death. Levi Darby became the executor of the estate of Aaron Darby and on May 21, 1870, conveyed the property by purchase to Edmond A. Seeley with water rights and surrounding land. Mr. Seeley was an industrialist from Troy, N. Y., who had been engaged in a similar business before making the purchase of the Fall Mill. The new proprietor made extensive changes; built a new mill 42 x 42 feet, and erected two other buildings 40 x 60 feet and 30 x 40 feet, respectively. The dam was rebuilt and its height increased to retain for power purposes the abundance of water flowing from the two brooks, which were joined above the mill dam.

Mr. Seeley was born at Stockport, Columbia County, New York, and since early childhood had been connected with the paper business. Here he established an industry for the manufacture of pasteboard, and it is reported that the output of his mill amounted to seven hundred tons annually. In 1876 he erected a homestead on the right, above the mill property, with beautifully laid out grounds in a setting of natural woodland.

As his business expanded, he added steam-power, which provided abundant facilities for a much larger production. He is reported to have employed between twenty and twenty-five men and a number of teams to transport raw material to the mill and the manufactured product to the market. The workmen in his employ occupied homes in the immediate neighborhood, some of which remain standing.

After the death of Mr. Seeley which occurred April 21, 1891, a certificate of incorporation was taken out by Agnes A. Seeley, his wife, Emma Seeley, a sister of the deceased, and two nieces, Florence Allen and Mary Frances Allen.

The corporation was approved September 10, 1891, and the newly formed company began to operate under the title of the Seeley Paper Mills Company. The manufactured product was to consist of paper binders and other boards; the offices for the transaction of business connected with the company to be located at Scotch Plains.

In addition to the manufacture of paper products the firm was also to engage in quarrying and breaking stone for road building and other construction. This latter industry was to be conducted on the west side of Green Brook directly opposite the mill.

The mill continued under the ownership of the Seeley family until June 10, 1924, when the only surviving member of the company, Florence A. Allen, deeded the property with all of its rights to The Union County Park Commission, and it has now become a part of the County Park System. The dam no longer exists and the buildings and offices, once the seat of industrial activity have completely disappeared. The imposing residence of Mr. Seeley in its forest setting located on the hillside above the mill has been destroyed by fire. Not a trace remains to mark the site of a once prosperous industry. The brook flows on in the even tenor of its way through an uninhabited, tree-lined gorge, displaying much the same aspect as it once presented to the Indian who followed the wilderness trail along its banks in search of deer and other animals of the forest.

OLD COPPER MINE

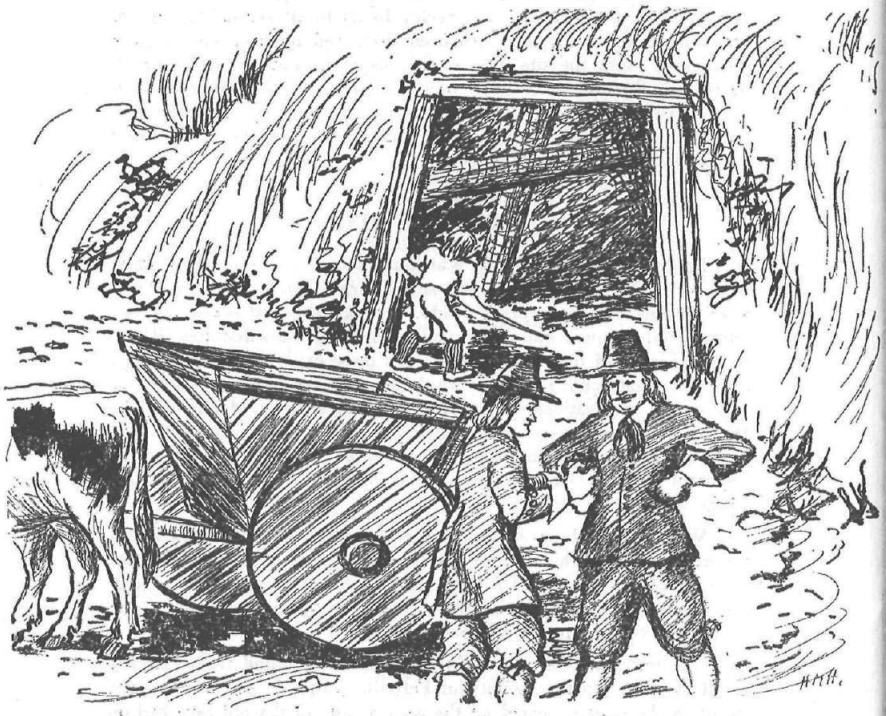
Before the region of the Watchung Range was settled by white men and while this territory was still a virgin forest area, the Dutch were prospecting for copper, guided through this untracked area by hunters and trappers who had already penetrated the wilderness. There is no evidence of the exact period when these explorations were made or under what conditions. All we do know is the present evidence of exploratory excavations, some of which can still be identified. The Dutch geologists knew copper was found in trap rock formations and inasmuch as the Watchung Range consisted of this formation, it seemed apparent that this metal might be found somewhere on the eastern slope of the mountain.

With such a discovery in prospect, the Dutch prospectors began the exploration of this territory and in some instances were successful in locating copper ore. The following quotation from the State Geological Report has this to say about one of these mines, located in the valley between the first and second mountain:

"At frequent intervals, copper ore has been found from Feltville to Pluckemin. In the vicinity of Feltville, sulphide and some pyrite occur in the ravine located on the eastern side of the old lake bed on

lands known as the Badgley estate. The deposit is found in a thin rock-seam between the layers of trap rock and the shales. The bed of ore was found at first to be an inch thick but the deposit increased in volume as the mountain was penetrated. Inasmuch as the mine was worked for one season only, its prospective value was never determined."

It is difficult to ascertain just when mining operations along the Watchung Range began or in the absence of records of companies to even form an estimate of the quantity and quality of ore taken from the mines when in operation. During the early periods, methods of tunnelling and removing the ore were crude and in a review of the fragmentary evidence available, there is every indication of inexperience and wastefulness. It is quite probable that in many instances there was insufficient capital to furnish the equipment necessary to carry on the mining ventures after the necessary preliminary work had been completed.



The Dutch were prospecting for copper

Transportation was an important factor, and at the time the mines were in operation, many of the roads were in such condition that they could not be used. Bergen Point seems to have been the principal outlet for the ore, although at times small shipments were made to other points. In certain sections, special roads were constructed that were temporary in character and in many instances built without grade or consideration of the peculiarities of the terrain. In a few instances, the construction was apparently under the direction of practical persons and in such cases eventually became the foundation of permanent roads, which in part at least continue in use to this day.

The natural conclusion is that the mining venture at Feltville was discontinued because of difficulties facing the prospectors which were impossible to surmount. Transportation must have been a perplexing problem to solve, as there were at the time only Indian trails leading into the valley. Whatever the reasons for discontinuing the mining project must ever remain one of the unanswered questions, the solution of which can only be surmised, and however far and thorough the research, must finally become lost in the realm of speculation.

George R. Iles, *Printer*, Elizabeth, N. J.

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